

Solicitation of Proposal for a Cooperative Agreement to Support the Operation of Transportation Environmental Resource Center

I. Summary

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has funded the development and operation of ten Compliance Assistance Centers (Centers) to aid small and medium size businesses to better understand and comply with environmental regulations. EPA seeks a partner for continued support and maintenance of the Transportation Center (currently referred to as the Transportation Environmental Resource Center). Proposals meeting the criteria discussed below must be delivered to EPA by 5 P.M. on Wednesday, April 30, 2003.

II. Background

The Transportation Environmental Resource Center (TERC) is currently funded by a cooperative agreement that expires in May 2003. Under the new Grants Competition Policy beginning October 1, 2002, EPA will implement its policy for competing the award of EPA cooperative agreements and grants. These requirements apply to all assistance totaling more than \$75,000 per year.

In FY 2001, in response to a Congressional earmark, EPA awarded a cooperative agreement to National Center for Manufacturing Sciences (NCMS) to expand the Centers program. Under this cooperative agreement, NCMS has developed a web-based "Platform" to efficiently launch new Centers and support the existing Centers. The Platform includes a suite of comprehensive web-based tools. States, industry, and compliance assistance providers can work with NCMS to establish Centers that will help the regulated community better understand and more efficiently comply with environmental requirements. In addition, Center grantees are encouraged to partner with NCMS to maximize Center operation efficiencies. (If the applicant partners with NCMS for web capacity and services, they would need to pay NCMS for services and should indicate this in the budget estimates.)

The goal for this proposed Center is to serve as the "first-stop" for easy to understand compliance information on EPA statutes and rules for the Transportation Industry (Railroads, Motor Carriers, Airports, Air Carriers, and Water Transportation). Compliance information includes "How to Comply" guides, plain - language fact sheets, and news and calendars of events of interest to this industry. To achieve this goal, the recipient must:

- Work with established partnerships and develop new partnerships with the transportation business community, federal regulatory agencies, and the compliance assistance provider communities to understand transportation industry environmental compliance issues.
- Develop content including, regulatory information, new rules, and pollution prevention information that will assist the transportation business community in complying with EPA statutes and rules. The recipient will identify new products and milestone dates for

each year of the five-year period. Products could include items such as new fact sheets, a listserv, or broadcast E-mail services.

EPA has sponsored partnerships with industry, academics, environmental groups and other Agencies to establish Centers for ten industry and government sectors. The Centers provide comprehensive, easy to understand sector-specific compliance information. In 1998, after extensive discussion with transportation trade associations, it was agreed that EPA would award a cooperative agreement to the American Association of Airport Executives. They were providers of the web-site called Transportation Resource Environmental Center at www.transource.org. The providers worked with the transportation trade associations (in particular trade associations that deal with motor carriers, airports, air carriers, railroads, and water transportation such as barging and trans-ocean freight hauling) to define content and to put up news, calendar events, and material that were useful to the transportation industry. The web-site can help the regulated community better understand and more efficiently comply with environmental (EPA) requirements. The existing Transportation Center web-site is at: <http://www.transource.org>

In accordance with EPA policy encouraging competition for assistance agreements, the Agency seeks proposals from qualified applicants who can partner with EPA, transportation trade associations and other interested parties and effectively support the development and maintenance of a Center to address Transportation Industry compliance with EPA statutes and rules.

In general, the Centers provides comprehensive, easy to understand sector-specific compliance information. The Centers offers a variety of services, including web-sites, e-mail groups, fax-back systems, and telephone assistance, depending on the needs of the sector they are designed for. All the Centers help businesses, tribes, local governments, and federal agencies identify specific regulations that apply to their activities, improve compliance with environmental regulations, and learn about pollution prevention approaches that could save money and resources. All Centers can be accessed at www.assistancecenters.net.

After EPA's February 2003 Request for Initial Proposals, EPA makes a determination on which applicants meet the eligibility criteria. Then EPA will request proposals from these applicants for support and maintenance of the Transportation Center to be submitted by April 30, 2003. EPA anticipates that \$600,000 will be available over a five-year period for this purpose. EPA will provide funds on an annual basis, with approximately \$150,000 available the first year. Funding each year will be contingent upon satisfactory progress as certified by the EPA Project Officer, EPA priorities and upon EPA having an approved final budget.

III. Authority

EPA will award financial assistance to the successful applicant in the form of a cooperative agreement. As authorized by 31 U.S.C. §6305, EPA will be substantially involved in carrying out this project. Anticipated substantial involvement will include collaboration in

carrying out the scope of work, technical assistance, approval of the substantive terms of contracts and subawards made with EPA funds, change of key personnel, and approval of project phases prior to continuation of the project.

The Agreement will be funded on a “multimedia” basis under Section 103 of the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. §7403, Section 104 of the Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §1254, and Section 8001 of the Solid Waste Disposal Act, 42 U.S.C. §6981. Applicants are encouraged to review these statutes and ensure that all of the activities contained in their proposals are consistent with the scope of EPA’s authority.

Funding for Compliance Assistance Centers is awarded under Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 66.305, Compliance Assistance- Support for Services to the Regulated Community and Other Assistance Providers.

IV. Applicant Eligibility

Only those applicants that have been invited to participate following the Request for Initial Proposals are eligible.

V. Overview of the Transportation Center

Seven trade associations and professional associations have formed a collaborative group to launch the multimedia environmental resource center to serve all modes of transportation. The documents are especially useful for airports and airlines, railroads, barging, ports and motor carrier industries. The Transportation Environmental Resource Center (TERC) provides information on how to comply with EPA statutes and rules through the web-site. The American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE) manages the TERC, with the trucking page managed by the American Trucking Associations. The goal of the TERC center is to identify up-to-date information on EPA compliance requirements and to make that information available to transportation professionals and the public. The information must be in clear, easy to read language. The TERC also seeks comments and feedback of users to continually improve the content and usability of the web-site. The web-site offers a Forum where industry can post questions and receive answers to questions from other environmental overseers, as well as obtain up-to-date news and calendar of events.

Many associations that have contributed to ideas for the design and content of this transportation center: American Waterways Operators, Association of American Railroads, American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association, Air Transport Association of America, and the Regional Airline Association.

The TERC development was possible in part through the financial resources of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. These resources allowed AAAE to bring environmental compliance information to the transportation industry and the public through the web-site, fact sheets, news, calendar, and other documents on the web-site.

The ultimate goal for this proposed Center is to serve as the “first-stop” for easy to understand information to help the Transportation Sector comply with EPA statutes and rules.

The TERC Center was created with Cold Fusion. It has a minimum amount of broad band demand so that it loads quickly. It has been tested for use on Internet Explorer as well as Netscape. In the past there were well more than 10,000 hits per month on www.transource.gov and the GreenTruck page had more than 1,300 user sessions per month on www.greentruck.com. (Note that this data is provided for informational purposes only. Applicants can propose alternative approaches to these for the Transportation Center. And the EPA can provide copies of the content to the recipient.)

VI. Project Proposal

All applicants must submit a proposal that identifies their ability to manage and maintain the Transportation Center. Project proposals must, at a minimum, include the following items: Executive Summary, Project Activities, the Center Management Plan, Clients Needs, and Available Technologies as outlined below. EPA will negotiate a detailed scope of work with the successful applicant. The successful applicant will be asked to submit a Standard Form 424, Application for Federal Assistance following negotiation of the work plan. (See www.whitehouse.gov/OMB/grants/SF424.pdf) Please note that the final application will be subject to the Executive Order 12372 Intergovernmental Review Process. (See www.cfda.gov/public/EO12372.htm) Applicants must clearly mark information they consider Confidential Business Information (CBI). EPA will make final confidentiality decisions in accordance with Agency regulations at 40 CFR Part 2, Subpart B. The applicant should consider the following project proposal format:

Executive Summary: A summary of the planned project.

Project Activities: The proposal should include a description of the following planned activities including milestones. Describe the approach(es) to:

- Manage, maintain and supplement content at www.transource.org and identify new content and products each year to foster compliance with EPA laws. (Products could include new fact sheets, broadcast E-mail or a listserve.)
- Identify compliance assistance needs and close gaps in environmental compliance assistance services currently provided to the transportation sector.
- Maintain, develop, and enhance existing and future partnerships with impacted organizations, e.g., trade associations, compliance assistance providers, and Small Business Centers.
- Conduct outreach to the transportation sector and promote use of the proposed new center.
- Explore and implement revenue generating activities to reduce the reliance of the Center on federal funding;
- Correct as necessary content on the web-site that needs to be updated.

- Maintain communications with the representatives of the Transportation Industry such as the trade association representatives.

Management Plan: A thorough discussion of how the grant will be managed, including:

- Internal Management Plan: Describe how the applicant will ensure the day to day success of the project. This description should include the proposed organizational structure, supervisory responsibilities, and a proposed staffing plan.
- External Management Plan: Project proposals must describe how the cooperative agreement recipient will solicit new partners and maintain existing partners to support the Transportation Center. Illustrate organizational structure between the primary project partners and supporting entities to the Center. Please note that all contracts for the purchase of goods and services must comply with the competitive procurement requirements of 40 CFR Part 30.
- Marketing and Outreach: A description of a marketing and outreach activity plan to promote the services provided by the Center.
- Financial Plan: A financial plan for the project that identifies all sources of funds. Although EPA does not require matching funds, the grant recipient is encouraged to provide information regarding resources (cash/in-kind services) that they would commit to manage the Transportation Center. The financial plan should break out planned expenditures by both activity (e.g., maintenance of the web site) and object class (e.g., personnel, travel).

Factors that EPA will evaluate in the financial plan include:

- ~ Ability to partner with other organizations to secure funding or in-kind services to reduce reliance on Federal funding.
- ~ Ability to maintain management control and track costs of the project and maintain required records on funding.

Past Experience and Qualifications of Key Personnel: Project proposals must:

- Describe the applicant's experience in managing and maintaining web based environmental compliance assistance services, or similar projects, and its experience in working with compliance issues related to the transportation sector.
- Provide information on its experience in managing Federal financial assistance, including the results of audits or monitoring by the awarding agency.
- Include a description of the qualifications and experience of key personnel and their responsibilities. A detailed description of how the qualification and/or experience of each key personnel match with his/her responsibilities is important.

Clients Needs: Understanding the environmental needs of the transportation sector is critical to the continued success and sustainability of the Transportation Center. Project proposals should address how the applicant will:

- Ensure the web site continues to be useful to the targeted user group(s) and describe existing partnerships with the transportation industry.
- Identify products (such as new fact sheets, listserve or broadcast E-mail), new regulation information and content to improve transportation sector environmental compliance. In addition, within how many days can the content be added to the web-site.
- Utilize the experiences of the key personnel enhance the Transportation Center's operation.
- Identify the needs of the transportation sector.

Center Technologies/Configuration: The ability to readily seamlessly adopt and maintain the existing Center web-site and associated software is critical. Project proposals should address how the applicant will:

- Ensure seamless operation of the Transportation Center
- Ensure that operations and technologies meet the needs of the users as identified by industry and trade association representatives.

Collaboration with Other Compliance Assistance Providers: The proposal must explain how the Transportation Center will interact and collaborate with other compliance assistance providers, government agencies, and organizations. Specifically, the proposal should address how the applicant will:

- Collaborate with other compliance assistance providers to leverage limited resources.
- Promote the use of Transportation Center along with other compliance assistance providers.
- Evaluate and demonstrate the success of the Transportation Center each year including output measurements and if possible measurements of risk reduction or compliance improvements for facilities that use the Transportation Center.

VII. Pre-application Assistance

Eligible and interested applicants may contact Joseph Hall at (202/564-2271) with questions regarding eligibility and threshold criteria. The Agency will post answers to significant or frequently asked questions on a web-site at www.epa.gov/compliance/assistance/centers/index.html. Applicants are encouraged to review these questions and answers prior to submitting initial proposals. Please note, the Agency cannot provide guidance on proposal development or other advice that may provide a competitive advantage.

VIII. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

EPA will use the following criteria to rank applications. Each proposal will be given a high, medium or low rating for each criterion. Each criterion will receive equal weight when EPA reviewers determine the overall merit of the proposal. Based on the ratings, EPA reviewers

will select up to two proposals for consideration by the Agency decision official.

1. Comprehensiveness of proposed approach to service delivery.
2. Innovations that may enhance compliance assistance services available to the transportation sector.
3. Demonstrated understanding of environmental compliance challenges faced by the transportation sector.
4. Cost effectiveness and efficiency of proposed activities.
5. Qualifications and experience of key personnel in relation to their responsibilities.
6. Previous performance history on similar projects.
7. Soundness of approach to collaborating with other organizations. (The approach can include the option of partnering with the National Center for Manufacturing Sciences (NCMS) for Center operation/maintenance efficiencies.)
8. Soundness of approach to outreach to all segments of the transportation sector.
9. Soundness of proposed revenue generating activities that may reduce the Center's reliance on Federal funding.

Any disputes that arise during the selection process will be resolved in accordance with 40 CFR 330.63 and Part 31, subpart F. (See web-site at www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html) Note, EPA reserves the right to reject all proposals or applications and make no awards, and OECA will not be able to fund this project until its budget receives final approval.

IX. Proposal Submission

Interested applicants should submit three copies of the proposal to the following address to be postmarked by Wednesday, April 30, 2003.

Joseph Hall (2224A)
Office of Compliance, OECA
US Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Each proposal should not exceed 30 pages, and it should include all of the information requested in this solicitation with a break down of budget for each category. A team of EPA personnel will evaluate the proposals based on the criteria set forth in Section VI and VIII and identify two applications for further consideration. An authorized Agency Decision Official in OECA will select the final applicant. An EPA award official will make the final award. EPA is expected to select the final cooperative agreement recipient by Friday, May 23, 2003. For questions, please contact Joseph Hall by phone at (202) 564-2271, fax at (202) 564-0009 or E-mail at hall.joseph@epa.gov.